No. 85

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

"THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD"

Price 10¢

It seemed that she was tireless in her efforts to please him. She hovered about him, put sugar in his coffee, and was willing and eager to do all in her power to please him.

K. of M. C., No. 85.

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AGAIN Alice looked at the ormulu clock on the mantle of her boudoir and her face became flushed with impatience. Suddenly a light tap at the door sent the blood rushing to her beautiful face.

She opened the door quickly and there, before her stood Larry Coleman.

"Come in," she whispered excitedly. "Are you sure that no one saw you enter the house?"

"I am positive. Every room in the villa is black with darkness."

He stood irresolute, his hat in his hand.

Larry Coleman accepted the invitation to come in with a gentle nod.

"I want to thank you, first of all, for the interest you have shown in my cause by thrashing Cortland so effectively, Larry," she began. "That man is my bitterest enemy, and for some reason which I cannot reveal to you now, he wields some uncanny power over me.

"As long as he continues to visit here as the guest of my husband, I must tolerate him. Sometimes when I am tempted to forget that I am only a weak woman, I feel that I could kill him."

Coleman looked at the woman's agitated face. Her black eyes seemed to blaze into his.

She had but to make the request and he would be willing to do her bidding.

She moved a few paces closer. Her voice died down to a whisper as she told him of her diabolical and cunning plan.

She was so near to him that her hot breath struck his bronzed cheek.

The faint odor of sweet perfume seemed to intoxicate him. He listened breathlessly, without offering any comment.

He had come prepared to serve her to the limit and he was ready.

Finally Alice rose.

She walked over to her dressing table and picked up a costly scarf pin.

It was in the shape of a horse-shoe. The inset diamonds flashed in the pale green light.

'I want you to accept this as a token of my gratitude, Larry," she said.

Coleman drew back.

"I—I could not take anything like that," he panted. "I am willing to free you from the unwelcome attentions of this man, but I cannot take such a gift."

Alice read the look in his eyes.. The man was passionately in love with her.

"You must accept some compensation for the favor I ask of you. If you would rather have money, I will——"

"No, no," he stammered, rising to his feet. His disappointment was very evident.

Then several minutes of intense silence ensued. Alice was watching him closely while his eyes sought the floor.

"I hope you did not presume that I would consent to compromise myself in any way," she said at last with a note of indignance in her voice, "at least not just now, at any rate.

"You must have patience, Larry. Perhaps the time will come when you shall have no complaint to make."

"I — I beg your pardon," he said contritely, and turned to go.

"One more word before you go, Larry," she quailed. "You are not going to forsake me in this awful crisis. Remember you are the only man in whom I

have placed implicit confidence.

"If you fail me, I shall have to succumb to the will-power of this man, and I would a thousand times rather die."

She threw herself into a chair and wept softly before him.

"You can rely on me," Coleman cried excitedly. He knelt at her side and took her hand in his. She suffered him to cover it with hot, passionate kisses.

"I would give my life for you," he cried hoarsely. Then he jumped to his feet and ran from the room as if pursued.

Alice rose with a peculiar expression in her eyes. Her heart beat fast with exultation. She had won him and was still master of herself.

She had been sorely pressed during the last few weeks. Earl Cortland insisted upon her paying him any sum he saw fit to ask.

She had steadfastly refused to grant other privileges, but she had seen it in his eyes that he would not be denied, that his conditions which he meant to impose upon her, would include even that.

Once she had been on the verge of confessing everything to her husband and throw herself upon his mercy.

The awful and overwhelming despair was crushing the life out of her.

Vainly she sought for an opportunity to strike a blow at her hated enemy, and the moment had arrived at last.

Never was a woman placed in a more trying position than was Alice.

She loved Robert Ames with all the power of her passionate soul. Life would be utterly unbearable without him.

Cortland was pressing her sorely, and it was in his power to destroy her any moment.

It was imperative that she must treat with him and pay any price he asked for his silence. Then she had touched the inflamable heart of Larry Coleman with the fiery glances of her passionate eyes.

It had become a necessity to her to keep him ensnared. She had imbued him with mad anticipations and desires.

Unless she was able to retain his friendship and keep his blind devotion, he also might become a menace to her.

The gray dawn of the east found Alice still moving about restlessly in her luxurious boudoir.

Her fingers were tightly interlaced behind her back, and her roving black eyes constantly sought the floor.

Her movements were those of an infuriated tigress driven to bay.

She was poised for one more desperate spring at the throat of her bitterest enemy. If her last effort failed, all would be lost, indeed.

Chapter 282

LARRY COLEMAN

THE DAY set for the hunt by Robert Ames had come at last. The guests were arriving at the Ames villa bright and early. Most of the participants were old friends of the young millionaire.

Some of them were college chums, while others were merely business associates.

It was a jolly party which set out from the villa toward the forest on the estate. Robert rode in the front ranks with Alice at his side.

She looked entrancingly beautiful in her hunting costume of dark green.

One of the party was Earl Cortland who rode directly behind Alice. He had made several efforts to reach her side and engage her in a conversation; but she evaded him purposely.

There was a dangerous gleam in her black eyes, which boded ill for Cortland.

When the forest was reached an opportunity presented itself, and the unwelcome guest hurried forward to speak to the lovely mistress of the Ames estate.

Alice faced him with an air of indifference and even disdain.

"I had hoped that you would refuse the invitation to come to this affair," she frowned.

"And why should I refuse it?" he asked.

"Because you know that your presence here is very unpleasant to me; besides, your conduct may arouse suspicion," was the answer given in a low quiver-

ing voice.

"I came purposely to have the last opportunity of warning you that my patience is well night exhausted," he shot back in a menacing whisper.

"The time you asked me to grant you to make the necessary preparation for our flight is up to-day. To be precise, at twelve o'clock.

"I really have not the least recollection or having asked any extension of time from you, Mr. Cortland," she replied innocently.

"In that case I will try and refresh your memory," He drew a sealed envelope from his pocket. "My automobile will be waiting at eleven o'clock to-night, one block west of the Ames villa.

"If you fail to make your appearance, this letter will be in the hands of your husband to-morrow before noon."

Alice trembled from head to foot.

Her face had gone deadly white and she felt tempted to fly at his throat and tear this fatal letter from his grasp.

She was determined—desperate.

"So you mean to drive me into a corner," she hissed. "Now listen to me, Earl Cortland! I would rather die a thousand deaths than follow you and be your slave. I know what you are capable of.

"You have demonstrated that to my extreme satisfaction. Now go—before it is too late. If you remain near me another minute I shall call my husband and expose you before the assembled guests. Do you hear?"

Cortland's eyes met those of Alice. They were blazing into his with a fierce, intense fire of hatred.

He saw her waver in the saddle as if she was about to fall.

He realized that it would be unwise to further ag-

gravate her at this moment. With an oath he gave his horse the spurs and galloped away.

The rest of the party had advanced into the woods.

As Cortland raced across the intervening space he came face to face with another horseman.

It was Larry Coleman.

Without giving him the slightest notice he dashed on. At the edge of the forest he turned back.

What he saw made his face turn almost black with rage.

Coleman and Alice stood closely together. It was very evident by their attitude that they were induging in a confidential conversation.

Cortland reached the gay hunters a moment later. They had made a halt to form some plan. The absence of Alice had not been observed.

Robert Ames was in the center of a group of horsemen, and in the act of explaining how the best results were to be obtained.

Alice dashed up a moment later with her eyes sparkling but her face still strangely pale.

Larry Coleman followed her closely. The men took their positions and the hunt began.

Alice had requested that Coleman be allowed to remain near her. He was to carry her gun and ammunition.

Suddenly the forest re-echoed with a number of shots, which proclaimed the unexpected death of several rabbits.

Cortland was riding to the left while Robert Ames had taken the opposite direction. Alice and Coleman followed the former closely.

Suddenly a single shot rang out. Simultaneously a terrible cry smote the cold air.

Earl Cortland was seen to totter in the saddle, then slide off and fall into the snow.

There was a gaping wound directly under his right shoulder blade.

He had been shot from behind.

Robert Ames was the first man to reach the side of the desperately wounded Cortland. He knelt and opened his coat.

The flood was flowing freely and it dyed the white snow a beautiful crimson.

The face of the wounded man was distorted with pain. He was apparently still conscious, but unable to make a sound.

"Merciful heavens!" the young millionaire exclaimed. "How did this happen?"

There was no answer from the circle of men who stood about helplessly.

An instant later Alice dashed up with Larry Coleman.

She jumped from her horse and ran to the side of the wounded man. Her face was almost ashen.

"Who—who done this?" she gasped.

Cortland opened his eyes slowly. Their glance fell accusingly upon Alice.

With a last desperate effort he raised himself to a half sitting posture.

His arm rose slowly until the finger pointed directly at the woman.

"This was—not—an accident. This—was—murder. and—she—done it!" he gasped. Then he fell back

unconscious.

It seemed that the frightful accusation had served to paralyze everyone present.

Slowly Robert Ames raised his eyes to those of his wife. The situation was intensely dramatic.

"You—you heard what Cortland said, Alice?" the young millionaire faltered. His voice was hollow and his lips were drawn.

Alice was unable to make a reply. She staggered slightly. Her lips moved, but no sound came.

"Yes—I have heard," came at last.

"Is it true?"

Again her lips opened, but this time not a sound emerged.

Suddenly the figure of Larry Coleman was seen to elbow its way through the ring of awe-stricken men. He met the questioning eyes of his master squarely and fearlessly.

"I fired that shot, Mr. Ames," he said in a slightly trembling voice. "It was an accident."

Robert breathed a visible sigh of relief, but suddenly a light seemed to dawn upon him and his face became livid with rage.

"You sneaking coward!" he thundered. "You did not give the man a fair chance. You shot him purposely."

"I swear to you, Mr Ames, it was an accident," Coleman stammered. "Mrs. Ames saw a rabbit in the distance and she called to me to hand her the gun. As I was about to do this, the horses collided and the gun was accidentally discharged."

"There is not one man among us who will believe your story, Coleman," Robert replied hotly. "For some reason you have had a grudge against the man and no doubt you thought this a good opportunity to murder

him.

"This matter will be probed thoroughly. I myself shall hand you over to the police. Give me your gun."

Larry Coleman handed his gun over silently One of the men took him in charge and he was hurried away toward the city.

Thus the hunting party, which had promised to be an extremely pleasant affair, came to an abrupt end through this unexpected tragedy.

During her husband's interrogation of Coleman, Alice had retreated a few steps.

She could not look at the man who at this very moment was sealing his own doom by shielding her.

Not until Coleman had been taken in charge and was on his way to the city, did she show any interest in the things which were going on around her.

It seemed that she was entirely bereft of her speech.

Robert made several efforts to draw her into making some sort of statement, but she would not commit herself.

She was taken home in a half fainting condition and seemed dazed.

The fatally wounded man was carried to the villa some distance away.

He bled profusely, and it was feared that he would not live until medical aid had been summoned.

Alice shut herself up in her room, and she positively refused to see anyone.

As a matter of fact she knew that she would break down and make some fatal blunder if she were plied with questions now. If she wanted to protect herself she must remain alone.

Not a single thought did she give the man who had so bravely and so foolishly assumed her burden.

Larry Coleman was really nothing to her. If he insisted upon destroying himself for her sake; that was his business. All men were such fools about a pretty woman.

Such were the thoughts which crossed the mind of this woman — a woman utterly without conscience—a woman utterly without a soul.

Chapter 283

DREADFUL SUSPENSE

ROUCHED in a corner of the divan sat Alice. The look upon her face was one of terrible fright mingled with hopeless despair. Every little noise in the house startled her, and caused her to tremble as with an ague.

She was about to face the most dreadful ordeal in her life.

Her husband had been summoned by the police to tell all he knew of the shooting of Cortland.

The physician had deemed it necessary to remove the desperately wounded man to a hospital.

Her husband had left her with the intention of calling upon Earl Cortland after giving his testimony to the chief of police.

She dreaded the return of Robert more than she did the hangman's noose.

In his intense hatred for her since the shooting, Cortland would surely try to destroy her by telling her husband all.

Only a few words from the lips of this man would forever bar her from the heart of the man she loved so passionately.

To her this was far worse than death. She was ready to face the disgrace if it must be; but she could not live without his love.

She groaned aloud in her frightful agony, then rose and walked the floor of her boudoir with her eyes half closed.

It seemed that even the light of day was becoming

unbearable.

Alice had not the courage left to go to the window and watch his coming. She was utterly broken in body and spirit.

The defiant and haughty toss of her proud head was missing. Her eyes were dull and lusterless.

Suddenly she started up with a low exclamation.

"God—what was that?" she cried hoarsely.

An automobile had come to a sudden stop in front of the villa. Was that not the voice of her husband?

A moment later the sound of hurried footsteps came faintly at first, but became more audible as the person approached.

There was a sudden ring of the bell. It sounded terribly harsh and to Alice it came like her deathknell and the hangman coming.

The door was opened an instant later and Robert Ames entered.

Alice heard his voice as he asked the servant if Mrs. Ames was still in her room.

His voice sounded a thousand miles away and yet it seemed to thunder into her ears.

With the chilly perspiration oozing out of her every pore, she ran back to the divan and hid her face in her hands.

She was ready now to hear her sentence.

The knock on the door was left unanswered, but Robert Ames came into the room without waiting for an invitation.

He remained standing in the center of the room and looked about in a puzzled fashion.

Then suddenly he perceived Alice huddled on the divan in the corner.

He was at her side in one bound. Alice rose to her

feet rather unsteadily.

There was a haunted look in her eyes as he put out his arms to support her swaying figure.

"What is the matter, Alice?" he cried in surprise. "You look positively like a corpse."

"Oh, I — I have one of those horrible nervous spells," she answered dizzily, "and my head aches frightfully. "Have—have you seen Mr. Cortland?"

"Yes."

She waited with her heart beating wildly to hear him denounce her; but the words of condemnation did not come.

Robert Ames attributed her extreme nervousness to the recent tragedy of which she had been a witness.

"My report concerning Mr. Cortland is not very favorable," he said at length. "The physicians fear that blood-poison has set in. You know what that means.

"He has been unconscious for the last two days. The chief of police has stationed an officer at his bedside to take Cortland's statement as soon as he regains his senses."

Alice swayed helplessly for a few moments, then fell directly into her husband's arms.

Her dark head rested upon his bosom and it seemed that her figure was beginning to slip from his embrace.

He laid her gently on the divan and bathed her white face with cool water.

When she opened her eyes a sickly smile played about her lips.

Above her stood her husband. Anxiety was plainly depicted upon his handsome face.

He was holding one of her hands, and his finger pressed down on her feeble pulse.

"Your condition frightens me, Alice," he said in a

trembling voice. "I shall send for Dr. Fielding at once."

"I do not need a doctor, Robert," she replied trying to raise herself to a sitting posture, "all I need is rest — complete rest. I feel very nervous since that unfortunate affair."

"Suppose you take a trip to the West?" the husband suggested. "Perhaps a change of scenery and atmosphere would do you more good than all the doctors in the city."

"I would like to do that, Robert," she smiled back at him, "but such a trip would be devoid of pleasure for me unless you were with me. Will you come?"

He shook his head gravely.

"That would be utterly impossible until this affair has been settled," he argued. "The trial of Larry Coleman will not take place until the condition of the wounded man takes a decided turn.

"At present the doctors hold out little hope for him. If he dies the charge will be murder; if not, Larry Coleman may thank his lucky star. He stands in the shadow of the gallows."

Alice shuddered.

"Some complications may arise when it comes to taking the testimony of the witnesses, Alice," he continued. "Of course, you know that he accused you of having fired the shot, in the presence of my guests.

"Unfortunately he made the same statement as he was being removed to the hospital. He had just regained consciousness and this time his accusation was heard by several nurses and the attending physician also.

"I—I did not wish to mention this to you at this moment; but I thought it was best that you should know this."

Alice was trembling from head to foot.

Her hopes had risen only to be dashed down again. What would Cortland say if he regained consciousness?

If he died without making a statement to the waiting officer she was free—free.

He was the only connecting link between her and her miserable past.

"Do—do you anticipate that I will be summoned as a witness, Robert?" she asked, eyeing her husband furtively.

"Most likely, unless we find a way to circumvent this move of the police," he replied, staring at the floor. "I do not relish the idea of having you drawn into this beastly affair, and for that reason I suggested an extended trip to the far West for you. Or, would you prefer to go to Europe?"

She did not answer immediately. What was she to do?

The idea of running away at this stage of the game might be construed as an admission of her fear for the hand of the law, if not her guilt.

Then there was still the possibility of Cortland's recovery and in that event she must be near.

"Please give me a few hours to think this matter over, Robert," she said at last with a feeble smile.

He nodded his head in silence. They sat there for several minutes without either saying another word and she kept her eyes on the carpet.

This silence was growing oppressive to Alice. It told her that her husband still had something to say to her, and she felt instinctively that it concerned her and Cortland.

She noticed that Robert looked at her closely a number of times, then opened his lips partly as if he was about to say something.

He shifted uneasily in his seat and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"I—I do not want to hurt you wantonly, Alice," he began with a subdued and quivering voice, "but during the few minutes I stood at the side of Cortland he was seized with a high fever which seemed to render him delirious.

"He mumbled many incoherent words. Your name was constantly on his tongue. He was evidently condemning you for something which I could not understand, because his voice trailed off into an inaudible whisper."

Alice's face had turned ghastly white.

"Please do not alarm yourself, Alice," he said when he saw her start up. "I do not want you to misconstrue my remarks. You—you and Cortland had not met previous to his coming to purchase those horses of mine?"

"No, Robert," she replied promptly in a slightly raised voice. "Earl Cortland was a perfect stranger to me; but why do you ask me such a question and at such a time?"

"The thought occurred to me while I stood at his side and listened to his incoherent remarks."

"I presume you will next accuse me of having had a previous love affair with Cortland," she flushed hotly. "I am afraid your imagination is running away with you, Robert."

"Not at all, Alice," he answered quietly. "I believe that there must be a good reason for Cortland mentioning your name continually in his feverish delirium. Understand me now.

"I do not mean to insinuate that you two have ever been lovers. There are other reasons why his wandering mind may be busy with you and your name.

"Perhaps the man has taken a violent liking to you. He might have even been in love with you. In such a case I am ready to absolve you at once.

"If Cortland has made any advances to you, it was not because you encouraged him; of that I am quite positive.

"I do not for one moment believe that you were in any way implicated in the shooting. Yet I would give much to know why Larry Coleman hated Cortland to the extent of wanting to kill him.

"This is a mystery to me, which I shall try to solve. I am only sorry that I did not discharge Larry Coleman after his brutal attack upon Cortland previous to the shooting; but you seemed kindly disposed toward this young scamp, and I retained him in my services because you pleaded for him."

"I pleaded for him because of this young girl, Cora Allen, who hopes to become his bride," Alice admitted. "Perhaps he is not deserving of any clemency, but my heart goes out to the unhappy girl."

Robert's face looked troubled.

He knew that Cora Allen was an innocent young girl who deserved perhaps a better fate than to be tied to a hotheaded scamp like Coleman.

She had been born and raised on his estate, and his interest in her personal and moral welfare was keen. He prided himself in her and her father's honesty and uprightness.

"Do you suppose he will be punished severly?" she asked furtively.

"That all depends upon Cortland's condition," Robert replied. "If he recovers he may get off with a year or two for shooting with intent to kill. If the wounded man dies, the case will be one of premeditated murder. No power on earth could save Coleman from

the gallows."

"It would kill poor Cora Allen," Alice quivered. "I hope it won't come to that."

"That remains to be seen," Robert Ames said, rising. "I feel half inclined to help him all I can for her sake. Then there is one thing in favor of Coleman, and that was his fearless confession of the deed."

At this juncture a timid knock came on the door.

It was the old servant of Robert, who came to bring him a special delivery letter.

The young millionaire recognized the handwriting to be that of his secretary, Arthur Vernon, and the envelope was stamped—"New York."

"You will pardon me, Alice," he said as he rose to go. "This letter is important."

He left the room hurriedly and sought the library.

Alice felt relieved to some degree. The worst had not yet come to pass; but there still was that uncertainty. Cortland might recover and resume his persecution of her.

Then again he might regain his power of speech long enough to unmask her.

The thought which worried her most at this particular moment was, as to what had become of the letter which she had seen him conceal in his bosom on the day of the hunt.

It was this letter which contained her undoing. If it by any chance came into the hands of her beloved

husband.

She mustered up all her strength and courage to devise a plan by which this letter might get into her own hands.

She resolved to visit the wounded man and make an effort to secure it.

Alice realized that there was no time to be lost, and she began to make immediate preparations for a trip to the hospital.

She left the villa unperceived after giving her maid instructions to make a suitable excuse for her absence.

With her face hidden behind a heavy veil, she proceeded swiftly down the Schuylkill river drive and reached the hospital in a short time.

The door was opened by a nurse who respectfully asked whom she desired to see.

Alice was in a quandary what to say.

She did not wish to reveal her identity, and yet she realized that this would be necessary to be admitted to the chamber of the desperately wounded man.

Finally she asked to see the chief interne of the hospital.

The nurse led her into the waiting room. She had scarcely taken a seat when a dignified, middle-aged man entered.

"Did you wish to see me, madam?" he asked a trifle hurriedly.

"Yes, sir," Alice answered in a voice hardly audible. "I would like to see Mr. Cortland."

"I am very sorry, indeed," the man replied. "Mr. Cortland is still unconscious and we cannot allow anyone to see him in his present dangerous condition. I am very sorry."

Her hopes were beginning to wane, but she would

make one more effort.

"I am a near relative of Mr. Cortland," she pleaded, "and I have come a great distance. Could you not make an exception in this case?"

She drew a yellow bill from her purse and held it out to the surprised interne.

He hesitated for a moment, then took it and stuffed it hurriedly in his pocket.

"I can arrange this probably," he stammered, "but you must promise me not to remain longer than ten minutes with the unconscious man."

Alice followed the interne as he led the way to Cortland's room. He opened the door carefully and gave the attending nurse a sign.

She rose immediately and left.

"I would like to write a letter and leave it for him," Alice declared. "You will see that he gets it as soon as he regains his senses, will you not?"

"To be sure, madam. I will see to that," the man replied with a smile. "You will find paper and pen on that table there. When you have finished, just touch the bell."

Alice nodded. She did not lift her veil until the interne had closed the door behind him. Then she took a quick survey of the room and sat down.

The face of the wounded man was like marble. There was not the least sign of life. She gazed upon it for a few moments, her eyes widening.

She would have given much to know that he was dead. For an instant a devilish expression shot across her features.

"I wish I had the nerve," she mumbled to herself. "But I can't risk it, the least struggle would bring that interne in here."

Alice had come for the main purpose of getting a

hold of the letter which Cortland had shown her on the day of the hunt. There was not the least doubt in her mind but that this letter contained much damning evidence against her.

And there was also not the least doubt that all of Cortland's papers would be examined by the police in the event of his death.

Without making the least noise she opened the drawer in the small table which stood near the bed. Sure enough, there lay a package of letters, marked: "Earl Cortland, private."

In feverish haste Alice waded through it. A gasp escaped her lips as she found a sealed envelope which contained the following:

"To be given to Mr. Robert Ames in case of my death."

It was the work of a few seconds to secret that letter in the bosom of her dress. After replacing the others in the drawer, she rose quickly and made a dash for the door.

"Thank you very much," she said to the interne whom she met in the corridor. "It was kind of you to let me see him."

It did not take her long to gain the outside. On the way home she read the letter addressed by Cortland to her husband. She had not been mistaken.

She shuddered to think what would have happened if this message had reached Robert.

With a smile of intense satisfaction she destroyed it, then hurried on.

Alice was in a state of strange elation when she reached the villa at last without being recognized. Her trip to the hospital had not been in vain.

When she reached the foot of the broad marble steps, she came to a sudden halt. She stood like a statue.

unable to move.

Her wildly dilating eyes stared at the frightful apparition which came slowly toward her.

The figure of a man had emerged from the front entrance of the building. He was dressed in the height of fashion and wore a silk hat. One glance at his handsome face sufficed to freeze the blood in Alice's veins.

"Philip — Philip Gordon!" she gasped, then tottered and fell.

Chapter 284

AT THE CABARET

ROBERT AMES was racing toward New York. He had been called to that city by a letter that he knew, this beautiful young country girl was still his wife in spite of the fact that he had married her when she was still under age. mind can be imagined very easily. So far as Hazel had been found. The state of Robert's

His first thought was to right the terrible wrong he had done her.

He had not formed any definite plans as yet. Arthur Vernon was shrewd and could be depended upon to solve any problem.

He had graduated from a law school and knew all the intricacies connected with the affair.

Young Ames felt glad that he had entrusted Vernon with the task of finding Hazel. His heart glowed at the prospect of holding this bewitchingly lovely young creature in his arms again.

After all she was his first consideration, and he loved her as he could not love another woman.

As he confidently expected, Arthur Vernon met him at the railroad station in New York. As they were driven to the hotel, Robert asked innumerable questions about Hazel.

"I wish you wouldn't be so inquisitive, Robert," the wily secretary answered. "There are a few things I would rather have you see for yourself."

"But where is Hazel now?" Ames persisted.

"I don't know where she is now," the other res-

ponded with an ugly grin. "But I know where she'll be to-night."

"And you will take me to her, Arthur?"

"Indeed, I will."

Robert Ames was mystified by the attitude of his secretary. That night after dinner, they sat for an hour discussing the matter. Occasionally Vernon glanced at his watch.

"I guess it's time to go now," he declared.

Without saying a word, Robert followed him. They went to Greenwich Village and visited a number of cabarets.

"Good God, man!" Robert exclaimed, his face somewhat pale. "You don't mean to tell me that you expect to find Hazel in one of these horrible places? I simply can't believe that she——"

"Listen, my boy," Vernon broke in quietly, "there are a lot of things you don't know and probably never will. Your knowledge of women is very limited. You don't know how rotten some of them really are.

"I thought that Hazel's confession of having a lover would convince you. Evidently it didn't. The only way to make you believe it, is——"

Robert Ames, in turn, interrupted the secretary.

"Please spare me any unpleasant sights," he declared.

"What you'll see to-night is the best thing for you and your domestic welfare," Vernon said. "And I may add that it will bear strongly on your future. As I told you once before, Hazel never had any real claim on you.

"She never was your wife. You insisted upon a marriage ceremony, and I helped you go through with it. Perhaps you do not know the performing of a marriage ceremony does not always make a woman a wife.

"But you had not been married a week when I discovered that Hazel was nothing but a very ordinary flirt. Don't be too much shocked. I could have made love to her myself had I felt so inclined.

"You fell in love with her young, fresh beauty," the vicious liar went on without moving an eyelash. "You never stopped to think whether or not she had any character.

"A woman with character will not accept a lover simply because she is separated temporarily from her husband. That is what Hazel did.

"When you insisted upon me finding her, I did it because you asked it. I have always had your best interests at heart, Robert. You shall not remain tied to a young woman, however beautiful, who is bound to wreck your whole life.

"I want you to see Hazel exactly how she is. I want you to see her at her worst. Of course, before we go any further, you must promise me not to make a scene. You can't afford a scandal. I won't let you make yourself the laughing stock of your friends and business associates."

Robert Ames could not find a reply to Vernon's lengthy speech.

He was forced to admit that there was much wisdom in it. Not for a moment did he suspect that Hazel had been driven to what she was by her traducer.

From where they were seated they could watch the main entrance to the cabaret.

The program had just begun, and the crowd was showing its disapproval at the first number in no uncertain manner. There were catcalls and continued stamping of feet.

"Get the hook!" shouted one man, obviously under the influence of strong drink.

"Fade away!" cried another. "You are rotten!"

Other and similar remarks became more frequent until all of a sudden bedlam broke loose.

The manager of the cabaret made an unsuccessful attempt to quiet his unruly patrons. Finally the curtain was rung down.

The girl who had been singing, stood in the wings with tears streaming down her face.

"That gang out there won't stand for any of that sentimental stuff of yours," a professional friend in extremely short dancing costume tried to soothe her. "What they want is something jazzy and a high kick or two."

"I am through," the weeping girl replied. "I am going home as soon as Hazel comes. "I don't have to sing here," she added with a sudden flash in her eyes. "I can make a lot of money a darned sight easier."

The other girl shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"So you can," she agreed. "But take my advice and cut loose from Hazel and her crowd. I never saw a girl from the country hit the gutter so fast as she did. You can be glad you are what you are. Before the night is over you'll probably have a chance of seeing Hazel loaded into a patrol wagon."

The argument between these two served to reveal Hazel's moral standing. And not a single untruthful word had been uttered.

From where they sat at a corner table, Arthur Vernon was first to see Hazel when she entered. She was not alone.

Another woman and a man accompanied her, and she clearly showed the marks of dissipation. She was also in the state of advanced intoxication.

The moment she was seated she got busy with her vanity case. She carefully powdered her face and

rouged her lips.

Arthur Vernon waited until the party of three were seated before he called Robert Ames' attention to them.

"There you are now, my boy," he whispered, touching his companion's arm and indicating the table on the other side of the hall. "There is your Hazel. You can draw your own conclusions."

Robert gave one look and gasped.

Yes, it was Hazel, and she shamelessly allowed one of her men friends to hug and kiss her in a public place like this. He covered his white face with his hands, then rose.

"Let's go, Arthur," he pleaded in a quivering voice. "I can't stand it."

There was a side exit only a few feet away. Robert Ames and the secretary slipped through without being observed.

Out in the cool night air the bitterly disappointed young man made a desperate attempt to get a hold on himself, and finally succeeded.

"Well, I am satisfied now," he said hoarsely and lifelessly.

"I am glad," was Vernon's prompt response. "Now go back to your real wife and forget you ever knew Hazel."

Very little was said on the way back to the hotel, but both men did a lot of thinking. Arthur Vernon had earned the money promised him by Alice.

That he had, with cold deliberation, sent a young girl to utter moral destruction, did not seem to worry him.

As for Robert Ames, he slowly began to realize what a fool he had been. At home a beautiful woman of his own class was waiting for him. And she was indeed

his wife.

He actually felt like congratulating himself because of what he had seen this night at that cabaret. He was a fool, yes, because he allowed Vernon to pull the wool over his eyes.

He did not return to Philadelphia at once. A matter of business kept him in New York for nearly a week.

In the meantime Alice lay in bed suffering from a slight concussion of the brain. It had been sustained when she fell unconscious at the foot of the marble stairs after meeting a man she thought to be Philip Gordon.

Several telegrams had been sent to Robert Ames, while in New York, but they failed to reach him.

Today, Alice was seated at the window, the rays of the warm noon sun kissing her pale cheeks.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of Dr. Fielding and a trained nurse, she recovered quickly from the shock and also the injury.

Her dark eyes had lost some of their luster, and her figure some of its fullness. She felt as if she had just been awakened from a long sleep.

Physically she felt very tired, but her mind was fresh and active.

She stared uneasily at the figure of the white-capped young nurse who sat directly opposite.

A telegram had arrived a few minutes ago with the glad news that her husband was on his way home.

Alice longed for the protection of his strong arms. She needed him more now than ever before.

It seemed that the entire world had conspired against her, to rob her of his love and confidence. Her mind was sorely troubled at this moment.

She wondered how much of her incoherent talk

this nurse had understood.

She felt strangely antagonistic toward this golden-hearted woman, who had not moved from her side for almost a week.

The nurse looked tired and worn. A succession of sleepless nights had driven the roses from her cheeks and left her wan.

A hard line was beginning to form around her delicate mouth. Alice was trying to read this young creature. There was something about this nurse which made her feel ill at ease.

When her innocent blue eyes looked into hers, it was always Alice who could not stand their gaze. She grew confused. In vain she tried to fathom the reason for this.

"I presume you were told of the cause of my nervous breakdown, were you not, Miss Carr?" she asked suddenly.

The nurse nodded.

"Dr. Fielding tells me that I was delirious most of the time and talked constantly," Alice continued, glancing at the nurse furtively. "My health had been failing for some weeks.

"It seems that the appearance of a strange man whom I met unexpectedly was responsible for my sudden collapse. No doubt most of my incoherent talk during my unconsciousness was about him, was it not, Miss Carr?"

"I did not concern anyone in particular, since you failed to mention any names," the nurse answered promptly. "Your wandering mind was apparently filled with abject terror and fear. Sometimes you would call loudly for help, then again you wept as though your heart was breaking."

Continued in next number

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